

**Opening Statement of
The Honorable Tom Feeney, Ranking Republican
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Hearing on “NASA’s Science Programs: Fiscal Year 2009
Budget Request and Issues”
March 13, 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this afternoon’s hearing, and my thanks to our witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to appear before us. We greatly value your perspectives and judgment.

Today’s hearing examines NASA’s Fiscal Year 2009 science budget, the changes proposed by this budget relative to Fiscal Year 2008 and their rationale.

I commend Dr. Stern and his management team for putting together an exciting and responsive FY09 request. Bearing in mind that the NASA science budget profile is essentially flat, the FY09 request nevertheless makes a good effort at remedying a number of deficiencies that have been highlighted in recent years.

Through this request, Dr. Stern has demonstrated that he is listening to the research community by – among other things – adding resources to the Research and Analysis program, increasing the number and frequency of small missions and suborbital flights, and initiating missions proposed in the Earth Sciences decadal survey.

This budget request also proposes to add a flagship mission to the outer planets, initiate an exciting mission to explore the question of dark energy, and rigorously control mission costs to ensure that the taxpayers receive maximum benefit. I fully support all of these measures.

I particularly want to ensure the continuity of missions and the prevention of data gaps. Also flagship missions shouldn’t be allowed to crowd out smaller but still scientifically important missions. A robust science portfolio should contain a variety of mission types and objectives.

Having said that, I want to reemphasize concerns that I raised last month at our hearing on NASA’s Fiscal Year 2009 budget.

America is the world’s premier spacefaring nation. Space preeminence results from the interrelationship among military, civil, and commercial space endeavors. Each augments the other. Leadership must be maintained in each activity. Strength in only one does not create space preeminence.

This approach also applies to the separate NASA directorates. Each augments the other. Each must pursue and achieve excellence to ensure NASA remains the world’s preeminent civil space agency.

But as time passes from that terrible February day when we lost Columbia, we run the risk of reverting to pre-Columbia behavior. As the Columbia Accident Investigation Board observed:

NASA has usually failed to receive budgetary support consistent with its ambitions. The result...is an organization straining to do too much with too little.

Both the legislative and executive branches – as well as various NASA constituencies -- are susceptible of lapsing into this behavior. We are often eager to assign new missions to NASA. This compliment stems from NASA's ability to perform the most difficult of assignments.

But all of us – and I emphasize the use of the plural – shun from providing what is necessary to achieve this excellence. The result of our actions is that NASA's resources are shrinking in real terms while the agency is charged with maintaining America's preeminence as a spacefaring nation.

The Columbia Accident Investigation Board observed:

Continued U.S. leadership in space is an important national objective. That leadership depends on a willingness to pay the costs of achieving it.

I don't mean to divert this hearing's focus. But I want to emphasize that all NASA programs are interdependent. When extraordinary or unforeseen problems are encountered in one, it's not uncommon to see the effects ripple through other NASA programs.

Turning back to NASA science, I remain awed by the breadth of missions that have been flown – or are now flying, the discoveries they have enabled, and the cadre of exceptionally talented and motivated scientists and engineers who are the heart and soul of this enterprise. Their collective efforts have generated world-wide renown for NASA as an agency having no equal. And having invested billions of dollars over the past fifty years to develop and nurture this extraordinary capability, it is imperative that we sustain it.

As we begin the next fifty years of science and exploration, I want to ensure that NASA's science programs are not burdened by mistakes of the past. We must ensure more stability in policies, resources and agency management; use accurate cost estimates; and implement management controls to lessen the likelihood of skyrocketing growth in mission costs.

Later this spring this Subcommittee will begin drafting legislation reauthorizing NASA. I know our witnesses will provide well-reasoned guidance and suggestions on how to provide policies and resources needed to sustain and build NASA's record of achievements.